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THE STRUGGLE FOR REFORM IN CHINA.

BY CHARLES JOHNSTON, BENGAL CIVIL SERVICE (RETIRED).

SIGNS are not wanting that we are on the eve of another political convulsion in China, a violent reaction from the masterly and masterful intervention of the Dowager-Empress. The forces which have been swaying China this way and that for the last generation are still actively at work; while time is surely if slowly wearing away the barrier which has kept the flowing tide in check.

Many writers, in a glow of controversial zeal, were led to represent the palace revolution as the visible evidence of an occult struggle between Russia and England for the sovereignty of the Far East; and, considering the forced retirement of the Emperor Kuang-Hsu a victory for the Russian party, they confidently predicted a speedy countercheck from Great Britain, and exulted over it in advance as a victory for progress, enterprise and a higher phase of civilization.

In reality, the revolution in Peking had nothing whatever to do with either Russia or England. It happened that one of the chiefs on the side of the Dowager-Empress, the venerable Li Hung Chang, was a firm friend of Russia, and this gave color to the partisan view; but it might just as well have been the other way. The watershed of the Chinese movement, so to speak, is a question of internal policy alone.

There are, in fact, two parties in China, one extremely radical and the other extremely conservative. The former is the party of the Emperor Kuang-Hsu; the latter is the party of the Dowager-Empress Tshu-Chsi. The Conservatives, under the lead of this remarkable woman, aspire to keep China as far as possible a forbidden land, a second Tibet, governed on traditional and theocratic lines. The Radicals, on the other hand, desire to see

China follow the lead of Japan, and put on the whole armor of civilization, as we understand it in Europe and America.

But the Conservatives are in sympathy with Russia only to a very limited extent; it is, with them, a sympathy of tradition rather than of policy, for the relations between Russia and China go back to the Middle Ages. They regard Russia as a friendly Asiatic despotism, and hardly as a European country at all.

The Radicals, on the other hand, have no particular sympathy with England. It is, indeed, one of the elements of their policy to foster closer relations with Japan, in order that China and Japan together may be able to stand independently as a great Asiatic power, throwing off the yoke of European, and especially of English, interference.

In truth, the questions which divide these two parties in China are much more serious and profound than one would be led to believe from reading the accounts of the critics and chroniclers of our press. They have a way of leaping to conclusions, which shows a great deal of courage, it is true, but, on the other hand, a great ignorance of the Oriental world, and of the thoughts and feelings of Oriental peoples.

It is taken as axiomatic, for example, that a theocratic government is something wholly out of place in the modern world; an exploded superstition of a by-gone age; something quite out of keeping with modern ideas and modern life. But Germany, and indeed every monarchical country, is in principle a theocracy; for the kingship is founded on divine right; and the fact that the coronation is a religious ceremony shows that the divine sanction is still conceived as authorizing the Emperor to rule. Russia, where the Emperor himself sets the crown upon his head, is even more directly theocratic; the ruler draws his right direct from heaven, without the interposition of the Church. But every monarchy is in principle a theocracy, just as every aristocracy admits the principle of ancestor-worship.

So that there is nothing essentially incompatible with Western ideas in even the extreme ideals of the Chinese Conservatives. And, as far as they believe in adhering to the traditional and native forms of Chinese life, and, incidentally, of Chinese arts and handicrafts, there is much to be said for them, too; for these are the forms of life which they have developed for themselves during generations, and even now their arts and crafts are in

many things so superior to ours that we buy as ornaments things which they destined simply for common use. In Europe the very latest ideal in arts and crafts is the introduction of the personal and creative element in all workmanship as against machinery. But this was the ideal of China and Japan from the outset. Every Japanese and Chinese artisan is an artist, and in this they are a century ahead of their Western critics.

So that one may easily make out a very strong general case for the Conservatives in China. And, when this has been done, it becomes doubly interesting to apply the same process in detail, and to inquire what precisely were the innovations which the Emperor Kuang-Hsu sought to introduce, and why this attempt was so completely frustrated.

First, a word about the Emperor himself. Kuang-Hsu is an imperial title, meaning "Enduring Majesty;" the prince's personal name is Teai-Tsien. He is only twenty-seven years old, though he has borne the title of Emperor ever since the death of his cousin, the Emperor Chai-Chin, five and twenty years ago, and has been sole responsible ruler, in theory at least, for the last nine years. The Emperor Kuang-Hsu is slight and delicate, almost childish in appearance, of pale olive complexion, and with great, melancholy eyes. There is a gentleness in his expression that speaks rather of dreaming than of the power to turn dreams into acts. It is strange to find a personality so ethereal among the descendants of the Mongol hordes; yet the Emperor Kuang-Hsu might sit as a model for some Oriental saint on the threshold of the highest beatitude. Though it is eleven years since his marriage with Princess Eho-na-la, the Emperor is childless.

It is not so long since the nobles of our most civilized Western lands counted it a vice to write well, and slept on rushes in their torch-lit, wooden halls. Their ideals were war and hunting, with bows and arrows, for the most part, with legalized plundering of the agricultural population to renew their supplies of bread. In those days China was far more civilized than any European country; and, in the life of the Chinese Empire, that period is only as yesterday. The two things which have done most to change the relative positions of East and West are gunpowder and printing, yet both of these have been known in China for ages. So that any inherent superiority on the part of the West is rather a pleasing fiction; much might be said in the contrary sense. The

West is superior in combative and destructive elements—the very things which the religion of the West has been trying to eradicate for two thousand years; so that, even from a Western point of view, Europe's material victory is a moral defeat.

Yet it is none the less true that China has been overshadowed and left behind by the Western nations, and the recognition of this fact is the starting point of the Emperor's policy.

He conceives the remedy to be an infusion of new life into the education of the people; a supersession of the wonderful system of intellectual training, perfected centuries ago, which forms all minds alike on the great Chinese Classics, "the best that has been thought and said" in the Celestial Land. It is the battle of utility against culture fought out once more on Chinese lines. Chemistry and physics, engineering and military science are to take the place of essays and poems exquisitely fashioned after ancient models, now the sole test of talent throughout the Empire, and perfection in which is the royal road to fame and fortune.

It is hard to tell which we should most admire, the genuine enthusiasm of all China for literary culture, for familiarity with the highest thoughts and noblest words of the sages, or the marvellous ingenuity and precision with which this knowledge is tested by a system of examinations hardly equalled, and never surpassed, by any nation in the world—the vast halls, with their cloister-like divisions for ten thousand candidates; the seals set on the doors before the papers are given out; the counted sheets of stamped paper with name and number for the essays and poems of each candidate; the army of clerks copying the themes in red ink, lest any personal sign or mark should lead the examiner to recognize a favored pupil; the enthusiastic crowds gathering at the doors; the cannons and music which greet the candidates first to come forth; the literary chancellor ceremoniously presiding; the lists of the successful eagerly bought up in the streets; the chosen essays and poems sent to Court for the delectation of the Emperor; the gold-buttoned caps and blue silk gowns of the graduates; and, lastly, the almost pathetic provision that whoever continues without success to try for any degree until his eightieth year shall receive it free, from the Emperor himself, as a reward for faithful love of learning.

By the way, we should keep some of our admiration for the

more than human ingenuity with which the Chinese students sometimes evade even the strictest precautions: the tunnels dug beneath the examination halls, through which surreptitious knowledge is passed up to the candidates, written minutely on the finest paper; the offices where needy and brilliant essayists are hired to personate dull, wealthy scholars; the refinement of knavery that decrees that, while the rank of the examination to be compounded for rises in arithmetical progression, the bribe increases in geometrical ratio. All this but shows, by crooked ways, how highly learning is esteemed.

Yet all this, while it reminds us how foolish we are to think of Chinamen as uncivilized, is not enough to win the battles of the world. Therefore, the Emperor Kuang-Hsu deemed it necessary to decree reform and the introduction of the utilitarian spirit. Peking is to have a University, as a rallying point for the modern spirit; and here a characteristic note of Chinese radicalism is struck; for the methods and standards of this first Chinese University are to be taken not directly from Europe, but mediately through Japan. It is conceived that Western ideals will then have undergone a process of partial assimilation and amelioration, making them more immediately suitable for the Chinese mind. In other words, it is held that the Japanese have already improved the culture they received from Europe, and that the Chinese, following in their steps, will improve it still further.

This drawing together of China and Japan is one of the key-notes of the radical programme of the Emperor Kuang-Hsu. "China and Japan," says a recent edict, "have a common language, they belong to the same race, they have all interests in common."

So a band of students are to set out from the Celestial Empire to the Flowery Land, as guests of the Japanese nation, there to absorb the light which they are presently to radiate, as teachers, in their own land. Two hundred are to go, as a beginning, and they are already being chosen among those who have some knowledge of Japanese. And before they return, if Kuang-Hsu's programme is carried out, Peking will have, besides her University, a whole system of primary and intermediate schools, and this system, modelled on the best Western plans, will gradually be extended to every considerable city of the Empire.

The University of Tokio, which is held to be the high-water

mark of blended European and Japanese culture, is to serve as the model for the Pekin institution, and temporary quarters have been assigned to the teachers in the princely palaces of the capital, pending the erection of suitable University buildings. Meanwhile, the sum originally allotted to the Committee on Education has been increased threefold, by a special Imperial edict, and the sum set aside for the maintenance of the committee has been doubled.

The thoroughly practical spirit pervading this new educational movement in China is shown in an Imperial order recently dispatched to the coast provinces: the Viceroy, Governors, Prefects and District Magistrates—the four chief degrees in the executive hierarchy—are directed to furnish the Emperor with precise information as to possible means of increasing the naval schools and supplying new training-ships for the fleet. A further very practical move is the formation of a Committee on Railroads and Engineering, with orders to draft plans for the opening of schools of railroad engineering at a number of central points through the Empire, from which, it is hoped, railroads will soon radiate to every considerable town, and through all the provinces.

Close on the heels of this follows another Committee on Agriculture, Manufactures and Trade. To the President and Vice-President of this committee are specifically reserved the right of free access to the Emperor at all times, on the business of their departments; and when we remember the divinity that hedges in the Son of Heaven we shall better understand how much he is in earnest, and how clearly he shows it by sacrificing his ceremonial prerogatives. A School of Agriculture is to be formed, with branches in each district of every province of the Empire, and these branch schools are to procure the latest agricultural machinery, and to exhibit its advantages to the mass of cultivators in the rural districts. It is hoped that a decade will not pass before the whole agriculture of China is transformed by the use of tilling and harvesting machines.

Another innovation, which seems to have been borrowed from India, was suggested by last year's famine in the three provinces of Hu-pé, Shan-Si and Shan-tung, all not very far from the capital. The Emperor had discovered that the system of distributing free rations among the starving populations was not a success—or, perhaps we should say, the system of allotting considerable sums to that end. For there is the old tale of peculation and dis-

honest officials, a Chinese version of the charges more than once brought against the American Government in its relations with the Red Indians. The Emperor proposes to adopt the British Indian expedient of relief-works, and further intends to improve the occasion by employing the men at these works in the various new industries which he is seeking to introduce throughout the provinces. This would include the building of railroads, the establishment of agricultural machinery, the extension of irrigation and the introduction of new manufactures. So that a famine will come as a blessing in disguise.

Another very important reform touches the procedure in civil cases. It is said that the Chinese courts have a bad eminence in civil law's delays, keeping a good fat process on the files for months and years, and even decades, to the end that many bribes may be taken; and after a judge has taken many bribes from both sides it becomes very embarrassing to decide the case at all. The traditional solution in India is to put the final decision up to auction. Before we pass too heavy a sentence on this form of corruption and brand it as the mark of an inferior race, we should remember that Sir Francis Bacon, Baron Verulam, Viscount St. Albans, whom Shelley wrongly called "Lord Bacon," and whom Mr. Gladstone even more wrongly called "Francis, Lord Bacon," was degraded for selling the decisions of the highest court in the England of his day. Experience makes it probable that this reform will be one of the hardest to enforce, since its success depends largely on the good-will of the very judges to be reformed.

Yet another measure shows a daring spirit of innovation: the foundation of a new Medical College at Peking, for the express purpose of introducing the methods of modern Europe. A license for this College has already been granted; but it has dark days before it, for it strikes a blow at vested interests of the most extensive character, founded on most venerable traditions. It is as though the Federal Government were to organize and endow a College for Mental Healing. One could predict stormy days for it, whatever opinion one held as to the Efficacy of Faith. It is true that Kuang-Hsu throws a sop to Cerberus by including in the course the traditional medical practice of China side by side with the new methods of the West. But it seems to me that this is a false move; for what battles there may be between the rival professors! Homeopathy and allopathy will be nothing to it.

But the next reform on the Emperor's list admits of no healing balm. It is a decree for the suspension of the famous Six Boards, a series of venerable sinecures, supposed to look after the education of the heir apparent, the royal stables, the due performance of bowings and kneelings, the imperial banquets, and so forth. Every European Court has half a dozen departments equally ornamental. These interesting survivals—and the salaries—are to become a thing of the past, their nominal duties are to be passed on to Committees of the Senate, and the buildings they occupied are to be turned over to the new Medical College and the Pekin University.

From a tactical point of view, this seems the Emperor's first grave mistake, for it sets the whole of the permanent Civil Service against the reform programme. Like many another bringer of glad tidings, his course might have been smoother if he could only have been persuaded to leave the Scribes and Pharisees alone. And the whole army of bureaucrats and lesser officials has evidently taken alarm, for we find a recent edict of the Emperor speaking in the following terms:

"The Government of the Chinese Empire, striving to elevate the various departments of the administration, and with the sole design of conferring benefits on the people, wishes to employ to this end the methods of the nations of the West, since what is common to the Western nations and the Chinese, has been brought to greater excellence by the former, and may, therefore, serve for our advancement.

"At the same time, the bureaucrats and scholars of this Empire, whose views of foreign nations are characterized by the greatest ignorance, pretend that Western nations are totally devoid of order and enlightenment, not knowing that among the Western nations there are many forms of political science which have as their sole aim the moral elevation of the people, and their material well-being, and which, from their high development, are able to heap benefits on mankind, and to prolong the span of human life. In the West, all efforts are directed to procuring the blessings which mankind is entitled to.

"In our ceaseless efforts to reform various departments of the administration, we are by no means prompted by a mere desire for novelty, but by a sincere aspiration for the well-being of the Empire entrusted to us by Providence, and handed down to us by our ancestors. We shall not have fulfilled our duty, if we fail to secure to all our people, the blessings of peace and prosperity.

"And we are not less grieved at the slights which China has had to submit to, at the hands of foreign governments. But so long as we do not possess the knowledge and science of other peoples, we shall not be able to defend ourselves against them.

"At the same time, our subjects evidently fail to understand the

true purpose of our unsleeping endeavors and exertions. The reason of this is that the lower classes of officials and the bureaucrats devoted to routine [the Scribes and Pharisees] not only do not make our intentions clear, but on the contrary, intentionally confuse the people with vain and unseemly speeches. Grieved and vexed that a true understanding of our intentions has not reached our subjects, we inform all China, by the present decree, of the true purpose of our doings. This is in order that our enlightened intentions may be known to the whole people, and that the people may know that trust is to be reposed in their Ruler, who, with the help of all, will mould the Government according to new principles, for the strengthening and elevation of the Chinese Empire.

"To this end we order the Viceroy and Governors to print these our decrees, and to exhibit them on notice-boards, and we order the Prefects and District Magistrates, and all school masters, to explain these decrees to the people. And likewise, we command the Treasurers, Provincial Judges, District Inspectors, Prefects, heads of districts and sub-districts, to lay before us, without fear, statements of their views on all imperial questions. And these statements are to be forwarded to us sealed, and must on no account be kept back by Viceroy and Governors. Finally, we order the present decree to be exhibited in a prominent place, in the offices of all Viceroy and Governors."

This is a most important document, and the key to much that will happen in the natural course of events in the Chinese Empire during the next few years. It is the personal confession of faith of the despotic Ruler of four hundred millions, more than a quarter of the whole human race. To carry out a programme like this Kuang-Hsu had need to be endowed with an uncommonly strong will, and, further, with unerring insight into the character of his helpers. Very much of future history depends on his possession of these two gifts.

Another projected reform is intended to cut at the root of what is certainly the greatest evil in the system of Chinese Government—the malversation of the revenues, made possible by the very loose system of accounts in vogue in the Treasury Department. An autocrat has been defined as one whose budget is not audited; if this be so, the Chinese Empire is suffering from an epidemic of autocrats. This time the trouble lies not so much with the Scribes and Pharisees, as with their friends, the Publicans and Sinners—the farmers of taxes, who bid so much for the right to extort what they can from a long-suffering public. The result of this malversation is such that while the taxable capacity of China is simply enormous, the system of peculation is so thorough and so much sticks to the fingers of the collectors that the Government is almost chronically bankrupt. The estimated revenue of the

Chinese Empire amounts to about twenty cents a year for each inhabitant. This is about one-fiftieth of the rate for most European countries, and less than one-hundredth of that of some. So that if the revenues of China were raised to about the same level per head as, say, those of Belgium or Austria-Hungary, China would have a sum of from four to eight thousand million dollars a year to apply to imperial and administrative purposes. And should the innovations contemplated by Kuang-Hsu really be introduced, there is not the faintest doubt that China could bear as heavy taxes as Belgium or Austria-Hungary, and in that case what a formidable vista is opened up in the direction of allotments for the Chinese Army and Navy to be turned out of the new and modernized schools. Further, what sums could be spent on bounties to enable any and every manufacture to compete with European rival products, not only in China, but in all the markets of the world. The open door is one of those beautiful rules that may work both ways. Supposing the door should be found to open outwards as well as inwards, and supposing the first thing to come forth were a flood of subsidized screw-nails, sufficient to drive Mr. Chamberlain out of the market, would there not be a sort of poetic justice in that?

As far as the revenue is concerned, Kuang-Hsu's avowed purpose does not go beyond a stricter system of accounts, a stoppage of some of the innumerable leaks in the aqueducts which deprive the imperial reservoirs of their supplies. But even a slight measure of success in this direction will raise the revenue of China to a formidable amount, and, further, would increase her borrowing power practically without limit.

And here we approach a very important matter from an international standpoint. To carry out these schemes requires an army of trained and honest administrators; it also requires considerable material resources to keep things going while the changes are being introduced. But, while there are doubtless many **strong** and honest men in China, the **Emperor** does not seem as yet to have laid his hand on them; and, as an alternative, he suggests, or adopts the suggestion of, a very remarkable measure. It is nothing less than an appeal to Japan to lend China a band of trained administrators, such as England has lent to Egypt and India. Only, in the case of China, the initiative comes from the borrower, not from the lender. And in the light of this idea the recent

Japanese mission to Peking, under Marquis Ito, acquires a new significance.

An excellent statement of this side of the question appeared in a recent number of one of the Peking radical papers. It is worth quoting at some length.

The writer begins by citing instances from the early history of China, and the story of Peter the Great, to show that reforms may best be carried out by foreign agents. He then urges the Emperor to seek the assistance of Marquis Ito in the task of regenerating China, asserting that only by a Japanese alliance can China take a firm attitude toward foreign powers and keep back the horrors of a general war. He continues:

"If Your Majesty could only persuade Marquis Ito to become confidential adviser of China, the reforms which you have undertaken would be promptly carried out, and the international bond between China and Japan would be greatly reinforced; while without Japan's help, the early realization of these reforms is impossible. Even granting that, among the Chinese who have recently entered the arena of public life, a few may be found endowed with the necessary strength of will, they are certain to meet with numberless hindrances, caused by the envy and fear of the enemies of progress. They will spend their energies and lose their reputations in vain efforts, and the ills of the body politic will remain uncured. On the other hand, Marquis Ito, as the experienced minister of a foreign government, who possesses Your Majesty's fullest confidence, and who is well known to fame, could have nothing to fear from intrigues in the task of introducing reforms. And foreign powers, in their international relations with China, would begin to treat our country in a very different manner. Their schemes of aggrandizement at our expense would instantly relax, and this would be the beginning of the transformation of China from a poor and weak country, surrounded with dangers, into a land full of wealth and strength, and rejoicing in the blessings of assured peace. This is the first reason why we must borrow talent from other nations.

"The fundamental principles of Chinese policy are isolation and separation, whilst among Western nations the principles of government are the very opposite of these, namely, intercourse and union; principles which serve to bring about the development of moral and material resources, while isolation and exclusion lead to the very opposite result. To these two principles, intercourse and union, the nations of the West are indebted for their greatness and civilization.

"From the geographical point of view, nations inhabiting the same continent should first unite among themselves. From the point of view of race and language, it is best for kindred peoples to be joined. The peoples of Europe and America do not inhabit the same continent as ourselves; they belong to another race, and speak other tongues. Therefore, in view of these natural obstacles, they cannot be closely united with China. It is quite otherwise with Japan. Although, carried away by her extremely rapid progress, and

that unexpected development which roused the apprehensions of both Europe and America, Japan made war on China, yet, when confronted by Russia, Japan was helpless. It is true that, in order to counter-balance Russia, Japan is making friends with England; but experienced men of affairs are convinced that war between them cannot be averted in the future. Whichever side wins, there will be great changes in the balance of power in Asia. England approached Japan solely because of Russia; England is foreign to us in race; she is foreign to us therefore in spirit also. What if England, whose sole motive is profit, should find it profitable to change sides and enter into an alliance with Russia? Then Japan, standing alone, would certainly perish. Therefore Japan's natural ally is China. If the Celestial Empire, with its vast natural resources, its huge area, its enormous population, should really enter into an alliance with Japan, borrowing from Japan new methods for the development of China's resources, and for the education of competent men, then Japan and China together, in firm union and alliance, could easily withstand either Russia or England, and assure a general peace. This would secure the integrity of the Chinese Emperor's hereditary dominions, and put an end to foreign encroachment. The designs of foreign nations can only be withstood by the material might of China, acting under the moral and intellectual guidance of Japan. Russia cherishes designs of encroachment on the north; as regards England, which is striving to maintain peace and gain its own ends, its demands make Russian policy necessary, but in reality England's designs are wholly commercial and selfish. If an alliance existed between China and Japan, Russia could doubtless carry out her design of a Congress in the interests of universal peace, and could enter into enduring and peaceable relations with the other nations of Europe. This is not only very desirable for China and Japan, but it is an object worthy of the sincere aspiration of the whole human race."

At this point a temporary stop was put to the Chinese dream of regeneration by the interposition of the Conservative party, under the leadership of the Dowager-Empress Tshu-Chsi. This very remarkable woman is the widow of the Emperor I-Tshu, and was co-ruler with the Emperor Chai-Chun from 1861 to 1875, when Kuang-Hsu nominally ascended the throne, being then three years old. As a result of her interposition, the *Imperial Gazette* announced, as we all remember, that the Emperor found it impossible to deal unaided with the vast mass of administrative affairs in the present critical condition of the Empire, "and requested Her Majesty, the Dowager-Empress, who had twice directed the affairs of China with marked success, to lend him her guidance in the conduct of imperial business." Then came three edicts: First, the quite credible announcement that the young Emperor "was very sick;" then, that several reforms were postponed, the famous Six Boards being reinstated; and, lastly, a

series of vigorous measures directed against the young Emperor's advisers. Finally it was declared that, as of yore, the Empire would be governed according to the principles of the sage Confucius.

One of the principles of this sage is obedience to parents; and we must take into account the enormous moral weight this obligation has in China before too hastily accusing the young Emperor of cowardice and supineness. But time is on his side.

It is always a delicate matter to speak of a lady's age, especially if that lady be an Empress; but the masterful Dowager is not far from the patriarchal three score years and ten, while her right-hand man, the hardly less masterful Li Hung Chang, is seventy-five. These two are certainly among the twenty most considerable personalities in the world at this moment, a sufficient evidence that the Chinese race is not effete. But mortality will claim its own, and then will come the turn of young Kuang-Hsu. If it comes even four or five years hence, he will be only about thirty, and his character will have matured in the meantime. I have quoted two Chinese documents at length, in order to show that, if we are counting on the moral and intellectual inferiority of the Chinese, we are suffering from a dangerous illusion. Therefore the success of the young Emperor's plans is quite a probable event; and that success will mean a huge revenue for China; a vast army and fleet on the most modern models, with skilled officers, probably Japanese; a quite unlimited power to subsidize Chinese manufacture against all the world's competition, with a working class of hundreds of millions ready to accept marvellously low wages and quick to master the cheapest and best methods. In a word, it would mean the possible swamp-ing of Western lands, in a military as well as a commercial sense. So that the policy of the door which may open outwards is about the most dangerous for the West that could well be conceived.

CHARLES JOHNSTON.